

BOOK REVIEW

PETER THOMAS. 2000. **Trees: Their Natural History.** (ISBN 0-521-45963-X, pbk.) Cambridge University Press, 110 Midland Avenue, Port Chester, NY 10573-4930, U.S.A. \$24.95 pbk., 286 pp. Line drawings.

From the first sentence in Chapter One, "Everyone knows what a tree is: a large woody thing that provides shade," you know that the book you are about to read is written by someone who has both a sense of humor and general enthusiasm about trees. Peter Thomas, lecturer in environmental sciences at Keele University, UK, brings together information scattered through myriads of journals and books from all parts of the world into one concise text, *Trees: Their Natural History*. Not only vital to healthy ecosystems, but also unparalleled in the range of materials they provide for human use, trees are a fascinating group of plants. This book—written for a non-technical audience—answers such questions as: How do trees work? How are they designed? And how do they grow and reproduce? And in fewer than 300 pages, Thomas provides a comprehensive introduction to the natural history of trees covering their biology and ecology.

Beginning with a preface and an overview of trees, then followed by eight chapters that more specifically address the parts of trees and how they live and die. Chapter Two covers the leaves, Chapter Three the trunk and branches, Chapter Four the roots, Chapter Five flowers, fruits, and seeds, Chapter Six, "The growing tree," Chapter Seven, the shape of trees; Chapter Eight, "New trees from old," and Chapter Nine, "Health, damage, and death." The book is then concluded by a list of further reading and an index. Boxes, black and white photographs, and black and white line drawings are abundant throughout and used appropriately. Another pleasing feature is the list of further reading that follows each chapter. These lists are chapter specific and contain books and journal references not listed in the list of further reading at the end of the book.

The author succeeds in his goal to "draw together strands of information to create a readable book that would answer common questions about trees, set right a number of myths and open up the remarkable world of how trees work, grow, reproduce and die." While written for lay audiences, the book is substantially scientific and the references at the end of each chapter offer the reader more specific academic follow-up information as they desire. *Trees: Their Natural History* would be suitable for introductory botany classes studying trees as well as lay readers looking for answers to questions they've wondered about for years.—Kevin D. Janni, *Botanical Research Institute of Texas*, kjanni@brit.org.